
Escalatory Dynamics of Neo-Pashtun Nationalism in Pakistan: Applying Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model to the Emergence of Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM)

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Abstract

The emergence of neo-Pashtun nationalism under the umbrella of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) represents a reconfiguration of ethnic identity and shifting of center-periphery relations within the state. Existing literature on the PTM examines aspects such as identity formation, protest dynamics, and state-society relations; however, it neglects to focus on the conflict escalation stages. Furthermore, no study appears to map and analyze the PTM-state relationship through Glasl's nine stages of escalation. Addressing this literature gap is pivotal for assessing whether the PTM-state contentious relationship is intensifying or stabilizing. Therefore, using a qualitative case study approach, this paper examines the escalatory dynamics of neo-Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan through the application of Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model on the emergence of PTM. The paper argues that rather than conventional warfare, contemporary conflicts often manifest as protracted politico-socio-economic movements predicated on issues of identity, a sense of relative deprivation, and historical grievances. The argument is substantiated by the emergence of the PTM, whose demands for civil rights, justice, transparency, and accountability have resulted in an antagonistic relationship with the state. Using Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model, the paper maps the relationship between the PTM and the state across the early stages of grievance-centric narratives to more advanced stages of extreme polarization, bitterness, and mistrust. The analysis establishes how reframing of the narrative from both sides transformed a local-level manageable dispute into a national-level cross-sectional confrontation focused on identity and ethnicity. Within the framework of Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model, the paper concludes by suggesting stage-centric strategies for effective conflict resolution.

Keywords: Neo-Pashtun Nationalism, Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model, Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM)

Introduction

In recent times, conflicts are increasingly characterized by protracted socio-political struggles. Instead of interstate warfare, these struggles emanate from matters pertaining to historical grievances, governance, and identity. The line between social movements and political confrontations is blurred when marginalized communities on political and geographic peripheries are mobilized around issues of political exclusion and alleged human rights violations. Understanding such socio-political conflicts requires analytical frameworks that focus primarily on the processes which escalate conflicts over time.

In contemporary Pakistan, the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) has emerged on the national scene as a major socio-political movement with significant influence across different sections of society. Since its emergence on the national scene in 2018, the PTM has portrayed itself as a non-violent movement focusing on constitutional rights and justice. Raising its voice for alleged enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, presence of unexploded ordnance, and broader consequences of protracted military operations in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the PTM seeks accountability of perpetrators of such alleged crimes. Furthermore, through public rallies and protests, the PTM aims to bring the grievances of Pashtuns vis-à-vis decades of conflict and marginalization into the limelight. However, such actions have brought the PTM into direct contention with the state apparatus. This contentious relationship, which often turns to confrontation, is characterized by episodes of political tensions, mutual mistrust, and competing narratives. The existing literature on the PTM focuses primarily on the issues of identity, human rights, civil-military relations, grievances of historical nature, and state-society relations; however, limited attention is devoted to viewing the conflict as an evolving process of escalation. As a result, there exists a literature gap in understanding how the PTM-state relations have evolved over time and how certain factors have contributed to the intensification of tensions between the two actors. Addressing this gap is crucial because conflicts are often influenced not primarily by their root causes but also by the factors that contribute to the escalation process.

To analyze the aforementioned escalation process, this paper employs Friedrich Glasl's model of conflict escalation as the primary framework. The nine-stage model views conflict as a transformative process in which certain factors push the parties involved to move from relatively manageable disagreements to active confrontation. The model focuses on interactional and psychological dimensions of escalation, highlighting how perceptions and competing narratives evolve as the conflict intensifies. The model is widely applied vis-à-vis conflict resolution as it offers tools for identifying escalation stages and intervention strategies.

Applying Glasl's model to the PTM case study provides several analytical advantages. First, it helps understand the evolution of PTM-state relations from grievance expression to widespread political mobilization to heightened confrontation. Second, it underscores the role

of competing narratives and identity constructions in catalyzing the confrontational relationship between PTM and the state. Third, it highlights the critical points at which opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation were missed. Fourth, it facilitates the process of identifying intervention strategies for conflict management and resolution. Here, it is important to note that the model does not see conflict as a static phenomenon; instead, it sheds light on its evolving and dynamic nature.

The paper argues that the PTM-state relationship has progressed through several identifiable stages of Glasl's model: moving from grievance-based activism to political mobilization and polarization to a seriously contentious relationship. Although the PTM-state relationship has not yet reached the stage of destructive confrontation as envisioned by Glasl's model, certain developments over time indicate that the conflict has the potential to move towards the destructive phase in the absence of active intervention. Furthermore, the escalation process is driven by factors such as historical marginalization, securitized governance models, political rhetoric, and mutual distrust.

Analytical Framework – Glasl's Nine-Stage Model

In conflict studies, scholars have long tried to understand the causes of conflicts and the factors which intensify conflicts over time. Traditional approaches usually focus on structural factors such as political exclusion, resource scarcity, and power asymmetries. Although these factors are important in understanding the origins of conflicts, they fail to explain why conflicts evolve from manageable disputes to active confrontation. Resultantly, effective intervention strategies cannot be formulated vis-à-vis conflict resolution. Therefore, in order to address this limitation, Friedrich Glasl developed a nine-stage model highlighting different phases of conflict escalation.

The model is crucial vis-à-vis conflict resolution because instead of focusing on static causes, it sheds light on the dynamic interactional patterns that drive escalation in conflicts. Rather than viewing conflict as a constant condition, Glasl argues that conflicts develop and escalate through a series of stages in which variables such as competing narratives and communication strategies evolve. As the parties involved gradually traverse through these phases, factors such as mutual distrust, polarization, hostility, and antagonism increase sharply. The nine stages mentioned in the model are broadly divided into three phases: the win-win phase, the win-lose phase, and the lose-lose phase. Each phase represents the situation on the ground and the perceptions both parties involved have of themselves and the other side.

Glasl's model also has the ability to explain that conflicts can be self-reinforcing, which means that conflict escalation is not just the accumulation of grievances and marginalized sentiments but also the transformation of the social and psychological relationship between the conflicting parties. As conflicts escalate, the actors involved increasingly describe themselves in opposition to the other; moreover, their actions become less focused on conflict

resolution and more on efforts to defeat, delegitimize, or coerce the opponent. Therefore, understanding the different stages of conflict becomes pivotal vis-à-vis conflict resolution because it can help with identifying intervention strategies and opportunities for de-escalation.

The Win-Win Phase

The Win-Win Phase of Glasl's model comprises the initial three stages of conflict escalation. In this phase, disagreements remain manageable and the parties involved remain open to a mutually beneficial settlement of issues through dialogue. Although early signs of distrust and contentious narratives are visible in this phase, the parties involved keep communication channels open and the possibility of a negotiated settlement remains on the table.

1. **Stage 1: Hardening.** In this stage, differences of opinion between the parties emerge and their views harden. Resultantly, due to emerging rigid positions, there is a sharp increase in frustration between parties involved due to their unaddressed grievances or claims. However, despite early signs of friction between parties involved, there is a belief that issues can be resolved through protracted engagement and negotiations.
2. **Stage 2: Debates and Polemics.** In this stage, the parties involved become increasingly focused on defending their respective positions. Consequently, communication strategies shift from collaborative problem-solving to competitive argumentation. Furthermore, the parties involved emphasize the superiority of their respective positions while bringing to light the weaknesses of the opponent. Although rationality remains part of the process, narratives become polarized and the focus shifts from mutual understanding to validation of own perceptions.
3. **Stage 3: Actions, Not Words.** This stage shows the first signs of escalation. The parties involved lose trust in the dialogue process and increasingly rely on unilateral measures to achieve their stated objectives. The trust deficit increases, collaborative approaches lose significance, and communication becomes merely symbolic. Glasl argues that this stage shifts the focus away from cooperative approaches and moves it towards confrontational strategies.

The Win-Lose Phase

The second phase of Glasl's model comprises stages four, five, and six. This phase witnesses a substantial transformation of the conflict's nature. In this phase, the parties involved increasingly view the conflict through the lens of a zero-sum game. Instead of seeking mutually beneficial gains, the parties involved aim to secure advantages at the expense of the other. Resultantly, the conflict becomes more personalized, polarized, sentimental, and driven by identity.

4. **Stage 4: Images and Coalitions.** In this stage, the parties involved are focused on constructing negative stereotypes and simplified perceptions of the opposing side. They seek to project their positions as righteous while portraying the opposing side's positions as malicious. Through such competing narratives, the parties involved seek

to build alliances to gain support from external stakeholders and sympathetic audiences within the domestic sphere.

5. **Stage 5: Loss of Face.** This stage marks a significant deterioration of relations between the parties involved. They focus primarily on undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the other side. This is done through public humiliation and moral accusations. In this stage, the discussion revolves around identity matters rather than substantive issues. The threats to the moral core of the parties involved make the conflict significantly contentious.
6. **Stage 6: Strategies of Threat.** In this stage, active coercion is brought into the conflict equation. The parties involved use threats, ultimatums, and intimidation techniques to compel compliance from the other side. The relationship actively shifts from persuasion to coercion. In this context, the parties involved seek to alter the behavior of the opponent by raising the costs of opposition. Resultantly, a vicious cycle emerges in which threats and ultimatums result in escalation; no party seems willing to back down because of fear of being perceived as weak.

The Lose-Lose Phase

The final phase of Glasl's model comprises stages seven, eight, and nine. This phase represents the most destructive form of conflict escalation. Glasl argues that during this phase, the objective shifts from achieving victory to inflicting maximum damage upon the enemy.

7. **Stage 7: Limited Destructive Blows.** In this stage, the parties involved finally accept destruction as a legitimate way for engaging effectively with the opponent. The parties involved focus entirely on punitive and coercive tactics to demean and defeat the other. Glasl argues that although destruction remains limited in nature, the parties involved increasingly view it as a legitimate means to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, at this stage, there exists a broad-based consensus between parties involved that constructive engagement and dialogue will not be able to help them succeed.
8. **Stage 8: Fragmentation of the Enemy.** In this stage, the parties involved focus on damaging the organizational cohesion and internal unity of the opposing side. To achieve this goal, different strategies are used, such as encouraging defections, creating internal divides, and damaging the reputation of the leadership of the opposing side. Moreover, steps are taken to comprehensively weaken the support networks of the opposing side. The goal at this stage is no longer to merely defeat the opposing side but to completely dismantle its capacity to resist.
9. **Stage 9: Together into the Abyss.** This stage represents complete and total escalation. The parties involved become overcome with destructive emotions instead of rational ones. They accept their own destruction as a norm if such devastation equally ruins the opposing side. All communication channels cease to exist, and mutual antagonism becomes deep-rooted.

Applying Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model to the Emergence of PTM

Phase 1: The Win-Win Phase

Stage 1: Hardening – The Accumulation of Grievances

In PTM's case, this stage corresponds to the accumulation of grievances due to protracted military operations in erstwhile-FATA. Although military operations such as Operation Rah-e-Rast, Operation Rah-e-Nijat, and Operation Zarb-e-Azb comprehensively restored security in erstwhile-FATA, they also resulted in significant socio-economic disruptions. These included massive displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure and private property, and prolonged securitization of the region. The securitization gradually became synonymous with claims of alleged enforced disappearances. The families of the victims claimed that the individuals were detained by security forces without formal charges or judicial proceedings. In addition, the existence of unexploded ordnance and the sharp proliferation of security checkpoints in the region contributed to the perceived sense of marginalization.

According to Glasl, this stage is crucial not because of the accumulation of grievances alone, but because of a growing sense among the marginalized community that their grievances are not getting adequate attention. In PTM's case, the Pashtuns of erstwhile-FATA started to believe that conventional political channels were not adequate for redressal of their grievances. The emergence of "neo-Pashtun consciousness" further contributed to the process. As a result, Pashtun activists under the umbrella of the PTM started to frame their demands vis-à-vis constitutional rights and political accountability. Since the demands overtly did not focus on ethnic nationalism, it gave impetus to non-violent collective mobilization for political and constitutional rights.

As for the PTM-state relationship, this stage underscores that the relationship was not openly antagonistic in nature. Although widespread dissatisfaction existed among the Pashtuns vis-à-vis the state's actions, expectations remained that the grievances and issues could be resolved amicably if the state showed a willingness to extend necessary and adequate attention.

Stage 2: Debates and Polemics – Competing Narratives

The PTM entered this stage through the organization of several rallies and demonstrations. Through speeches in these rallies and demonstrations, PTM's leadership aimed to highlight the grievances of Pashtuns at the national level. In this regard, PTM's 2018 Islamabad sit-in became significant. Initially organized to protest the killing of a young Pashtun named Naqeeb Ullah Mehsud, the sit-in evolved into a platform to shed light on broader grievances of the Pashtuns. These grievances included missing persons, proliferation of military checkpoints, and landmines.

Through effective communication strategies, PTM leaders framed their narrative in constitutional language, with emphasis on the rule of law, accountability, equality before the law, and protection of human rights. This helped PTM leaders portray the movement as advocating within the broader framework of the constitution rather than outside of it, as

argued by the state.

Simultaneously, competing narratives emerged vis-à-vis PTM's objectives. Critics of the movement argued that PTM was influenced by external actors aiming to destabilize the western borderlands of Pakistan. Meanwhile, supporters and sympathizers of the movement described PTM as a movement seeking social justice and accountability.

Stage 3: Actions, Not Words – Transition to Organized Mobilization

For PTM, this transition was visible as the movement's rallies and demonstrations moved beyond Islamabad into other urban centers of Pakistan. Cities such as Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, and Quetta witnessed widespread protests, indicating that PTM had transformed from a local tribal-area movement into a nationwide phenomenon seeking constitutional protections.

Throughout this period, PTM maintained its non-violent characteristics, especially in the country's urban centers. This helped the movement increase its popularity beyond the Pashtuns of erstwhile-FATA. Civil society in urban centers started to resonate with the non-violent nature of the movement along with its demands within the constitutional framework. Consequently, PTM sustained moral legitimacy and widened its support base.

As PTM's mobilization expanded, tensions with the state also escalated. Increased focus on PTM's demands and modus operandi made criticism of the movement more profound. Moreover, competing narratives and rhetoric intensified. At this stage, although communication channels between PTM and the state did not entirely break, mutual suspicion and the trust deficit increased.

Phase 2: The Win-Lose Phase

Stage 4: Images and Coalitions – Constructing Opposing Narratives

This stage pertains to the visible emergence of competing narratives between PTM and the state. PTM's leaders, supporters, and sympathizers portrayed the movement as a non-violent phenomenon focused on the constitutional rights of the Pashtuns of erstwhile-FATA. Moreover, they sought justice for alleged human rights violations by the state. Within this narrative, the movement demanded that decades of marginalization, securitized governance, and resource denial should be rectified.

Conversely, at this stage, the political and security establishment started to view PTM through a security lens. In this regard, concerns emerged vis-à-vis PTM's anti-state rhetoric and political modus operandi. Furthermore, the state questioned the ethnicity-based advocacy of the movement and its detrimental impact on national cohesion. As a result, the discourse became polarized.

For PTM, social media played a crucial role in this stage. In order to bypass alleged media blackouts, PTM relied heavily on social media platforms to spread its message and mobilize

supporters. Moreover, social media platforms helped PTM document its grievances and effectively challenge the state narrative against it. It is important to note that the same social media platforms that facilitated the proliferation of competing narratives also deepened polarization.

In this stage, coalition-building also transformed the dynamics of the PTM-state relationship. PTM attracted support from journalists, civil society organizations, students, human rights advocates, members of academia, and the Pashtun diaspora. This support helped PTM gain visibility and traction, allowing access to advocacy platforms at both national and international levels.

Meanwhile, the state benefited from established political, bureaucratic, and media networks which amplified the state's narrative vis-à-vis national security, stability, and cohesion. Subsequently, the PTM-state conflict expanded into a broader contention between established systems and emerging social realities, with discourse revolving around constitutional issues such as identity, resource allocation, equal citizenship, rule of law, accountability, security, and dissent.

Stage 5: Loss of Face – Politics of Delegitimization

The PTM-state conflict entered this stage when public narratives shifted towards attempts to delegitimize each other. Both sides, through their communication strategies, aimed to ruin the reputation of the other. The objective was to portray one's own narrative as legitimate while describing the other as immoral. In this stage, the discourse shifted away from substantive grievances.

From the perspective of PTM, the movement's struggle was legitimate as it revolved around claims of non-violence and constitutionalism. Furthermore, the movement portrayed itself as the sole voice for the marginalized Pashtuns of erstwhile-FATA. Since the movement consistently underscored constitutionalism and raised its voice against alleged human rights violations like enforced disappearances, it sought to establish moral authority vis-à-vis the state. Such narrative framing also helped the movement project itself as an advocate of justice and accountability.

Contrastingly, the state's narrative moved away from challenging PTM's claims vis-à-vis politico-socio-economic grievances to convincing the general public about PTM's external influences. Since PTM leadership frequently criticized state institutions in rallies, the state used PTM's rhetoric against them by taking legal action. Additionally, critical discourse from PTM provided a basis for the state to restrict the movement's public activities and initiate thorough scrutiny of its leadership. Resultantly, various reports from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan indicated a pattern of First Information Reports (FIRs), arrests, and other restrictions on PTM's top-tier leadership. The subsequent conflict between both sides became a struggle for legitimacy. Once actors become invested in defending their public

image, compromise becomes increasingly difficult as both sides believe that concessions may be interpreted by the general public as weakness.

Stage 6: Strategies of Threat – Coercion, Deterrence, and Escalation

This stage was characterized by increasing attempts from both sides to coerce the other side into making concessions. This was done through growing pressure on the other side. PTM used rallies, protests, and advocacy campaigns to politically damage the reputation of the state. Through effective strategic communication, PTM maintained visibility at both national and international levels.

Activists sympathetic to PTM viewed sustained engagement with the public through strategic messaging as key to ensuring national discourse remained in the movement's favor. Moreover, the movement made certain that grievances remained central to public discourse.

Meanwhile, the state used legal levers to coerce the movement and its supporters. Efforts were made to initiate legal proceedings against certain PTM members, and the movement's rallies were restricted. In addition, enhanced surveillance of PTM leadership was introduced. From the state's perspective, the activities of PTM were viewed as extremely damaging to national security.

In this stage, the PTM-state conflict became increasingly confrontational. Public statements from both sides became unambiguously antagonistic, and the mutual trust deficit amplified. Also, opportunities for dialogue became ever more limited. Both sides viewed each other's actions as hostile with nefarious intentions, reinforcing antagonistic perceptions.

Phase 3: The Lose-Lose Phase

Unlike other conflicts, the PTM-state conflict is not violent in nature. PTM leadership has consistently projected itself as a non-violent movement focused on constitutionalism. Furthermore, the movement has fixated on justice, accountability, and transparency instead of advocacy for armed resistance or separatism. Therefore, despite significant tension between PTM and the state, the conflict has not developed into an armed confrontation. For this reason, it can be argued that the PTM-state conflict has exhibited some characteristics of Stage 7 and Stage 8 of Glasl's model, while Stage 9 represents a potential trajectory rather than a reality at present. Another crucial aspect to consider is that the PTM-state conflict encompasses legal, social, political, economic, and symbolic dimensions; therefore, conflict escalation does not occur solely in the physical domain.

Stage 7: Limited Destructive Blows

This stage is characterized by the escalation of coercive techniques used by both sides. From PTM's perspective, this stage witnessed a sharp increase in anti-PTM state actions, including arrests, media blackouts, and travel restrictions for the movement's leadership. Moreover, an enhanced use of anti-terrorism laws to detain and prosecute PTM leadership was observed. In this regard, reports from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists have documented violations of freedom of

speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, and other undesirable treatments meted out to PTM activists.

From the state's perspective, this stage represented a hard shift in PTM's anti-state narrative. The rhetoric from PTM's rallies and demonstrations became more hostile toward the state. Besides, there were instances of contentious remarks made by PTM leadership. In this stage, the state claimed that PTM's self-portrayal of non-violence was a ruse and that the movement was involved in provocation and violence against security forces in erstwhile-FATA. The state also claimed that PTM cadres stormed military and paramilitary check posts in erstwhile-FATA to create mischief. For example, in the "Kharqamar Incident," the state claimed that PTM leadership instigated supporters to attack a military check post in North Waziristan. Resultantly, security forces opened fire, killing several PTM activists and supporters. PTM refers to the incident as the "Kharqamar Massacre".

This action-reaction escalation drove the PTM-state relationship in Stage 7. Although such escalation cannot be described as an outbreak of active warfare, tensions between both parties had reached a stage where violence was a potential trajectory.

Stage 8: Fragmentation of the Opponent

This stage is important with respect to PTM. Although tensions between PTM and the state remained, active confrontation still remained a potential trajectory rather than a reality. However, in this stage, state pressure affected PTM's organizational cohesion. First, state pressure tactics contributed to fissures within PTM leadership regarding how to react to state actions. One faction wanted to pursue objectives through parliamentary politics, while another rejected parliamentary politics in favor of continued street agitation. This resulted in the creation of a breakaway faction within PTM, led by Mohsin Dawar, which described itself as the National Democratic Movement (NDM). Consequently, a nationwide perception emerged that due to leadership infighting, the movement had lost momentum.

Second, seeing PTM weakened, the state took another step in the legal domain and proscribed the movement under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, declaring PTM a proscribed organization. The state maintained that PTM's activities were prejudicial to public order and national security. Courts upheld the ban, dismissing petitions challenging the government's order.

Stage 9: Into the Abyss – Potential Trajectory Rather than a Reality

Within the broader context of the PTM-state conflict, this stage represents a potential trajectory rather than an empirical reality. From an analytical standpoint, key characteristics of Stage 9 of Glasl's model do not exist vis-à-vis PTM and the state:

- First, PTM has maintained a non-violent outlook toward the state. Despite the state's claims to the contrary, PTM has not been involved in taking up arms against the state.

The entire rhetoric of PTM is premised on ensuring constitutional protections for the Pashtuns of erstwhile-FATA. Regardless of tensions, an armed conflict has not materialized.

- Second, although communication between PTM and the state has become bitter, it has not broken down entirely. A semblance of communication and debate persists through parliamentary institutions, civil society advocacy, social media platforms, and public discourse. The prevalence of such channels ensures that a complete collapse in relations has not occurred.
- Third, neither party has shown willingness for mutual destruction. Although tensions exist, both sides have shown a desire to remain within the confines of the constitutional framework. Consequently, the conflict remains politico-security-centric rather than existential.

Glasl's Intervention Strategies Across Nine Stages of Conflict Escalation

A significant aspect of Glasl's model is that, apart from explaining how conflicts escalate, it prescribes specific intervention strategies for conflict de-escalation and resolution. Glasl argues that with every new stage of escalation, the parties lose the ability to resolve the dispute independently. Therefore, intervention strategies must correspond directly with the specific stage of conflict escalation.

- **Phase 1 Interventions:** During the first phase of conflict escalation, the parties involved retain the ability to communicate rationally and seek mutual benefit despite their disagreements. Therefore, Glasl argues that intervention strategies should focus on direct negotiations, facilitation, or process moderation. Third parties in this phase should not impose solutions, but rather focus on removing friction and improving communication.
- **Phase 2 Interventions:** As the conflict escalates to the second phase, mutual trust declines and the desire to defeat the other side becomes profound. Moreover, since this phase witnesses the emergence of stereotypes, rational dialogue becomes difficult to maintain, and emotions play a dominant role. Consequently, professional third-party mediation becomes crucial. The mediator takes an active part in negotiations through the creation of communication structures, negotiation procedures, and assisting both parties in identifying acceptable compromises. It is the mediator's primary duty to ensure hostility remains within manageable levels to prevent escalation toward the destructive phase.
- **Phase 3 Interventions:** The final phase of Glasl's model represents the gravest challenge for conflict intervention. Because the parties have lost the ability to communicate and resolve the conflict voluntarily, they focus primarily on damaging the opposing side. Under such circumstances, mediation alone is not a viable strategy. For this phase, Glasl recommends more authoritative forms of intervention, including conciliation, arbitration, institutional intervention, or externally sponsored/supervised

negotiation processes. Through these processes, restoring communication is insufficient; mutual confidence must be rebuilt and reciprocal fears reduced.

Applying Glasl's Stage Eight Intervention Strategies to the PTM-State Conflict

Since the preceding analysis establishes that the PTM-state conflict exhibits characteristics of Stage 8 of Glasl's model, the corresponding intervention strategy—**conciliation**—must be considered for conflict resolution. Conciliation calls for an authoritative and credible third-party intervention. The third party becomes involved not only in shaping the negotiating process but also in identifying and proposing concrete solutions. The conciliator assumes the role of restoring communication and building confidence between the conflicting parties.

In the context of the PTM-state conflict, this role can be fulfilled by a nationally respected institution possessing constitutional legitimacy and broad public support. A parliamentary commission, a panel of senior judges, or an independent commission comprising constitutional experts, retired judges, civil society members, academics, human rights practitioners, and senior journalists can perform this function.

The objective of the conciliation process is not to declare winners and losers, but to establish a mutually acceptable framework under which dialogue can resume. Furthermore, the framework must focus primarily on future resolution rather than becoming mired in past blame games. Only then can both parties move forward from the potential abyss.

Glasl emphasizes that intervention strategies should prioritize stabilization before reconciliation. Therefore, in the PTM-state context, instead of focusing immediately on grand gestures of reconciliation, efforts should aim to contain immediate escalation. Through effective confidence-building measures (CBMs), steps should be taken to reduce mutual distrust and reciprocal perceptions of threat. The subsequent step is ensuring the re-establishment of procedural legitimacy. Because PTM and the state differ in their interpretations of historical events and political considerations, immediate consensus is unlikely. Therefore, restoring initial confidence in the credibility of the institutional process, rule of law, procedural transparency, and constitutional accountability is an essential prerequisite for conflict de-escalation.

Conclusion

This paper examined the evolution of the conflict between PTM and the state through the analytical framework of Glasl's nine-stage model of conflict escalation. Instead of viewing the conflict through a static lens of politics, ethnicity, security, society, or economics, the paper adopted a process-oriented approach to understand how the conflict has transformed over time. The analysis demonstrated that the PTM-state conflict evolved from a manageable disagreement over civil-human rights and governance issues into a polarized confrontation characterized by extreme mistrust and competing narratives.

Following Glasl's model, the paper underscored that because the conflict currently displays characteristics of Stage 8 escalation, conciliation represents the appropriate intervention

strategy for conflict resolution. The study offers a broader lesson for peace and conflict studies: conflict escalation is neither sudden nor inevitable; rather, it is a gradual process resulting from cumulative failures, and it can be halted at any point through the application of stage-appropriate intervention strategies.

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